

[1898]

RESPONSIVITY OF MIND

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relation may be considered to begin in the animal realm with organisms adapted to environment through physiologic processes, and to end in that realm of enlightened humanity in which mind molds environment through complete nature-conquest. In the serial scale so defined the various primitive tribes and more advanced peoples may be arranged in the order of mental power or culture status; when the same arrangement will express in inverse order the relative closeness with which the several tribal minds reflect their environments. It follows that the lowly minds and craft of the Seri reflect their distinctive environment with exceeding, perhaps unparalleled, closeness, because of their very lowliness; it follows, too, that any other equally ~~lowly~~ folk imported into the region and perfectly wonted to it by generations of experience would equally reflect the physical features of the region in their craft and in their thinking; it follows, also, that if the Seri were transported into any other district of equally distinctive physical features, they would gradually adapt themselves to the new environment—though with some added intelligence, and hence with diminished closeness, as is the way of demotic development—in such manner that their craft and thinking would reflect its features. In a more general way it follows that those similarities in culture, or activital coincidences, which have impressed the ethnologic students of the world (notably Powell and Brinton), are normal and inevitable in primitive culture and of diminishing prominence with cultural advancement.

SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

Among the Seri, as among many other aboriginal tribes, the social relations are largely esoteric; moreover, in this, as in other savage groups, the social laws are not codified, nor even definitely formulated, but exist mainly as mere habits of action arising in instinct and sanctioned by usage; so that the tribesmen could not define the law even if they would. Accordingly the Seri socialry¹ is to be ascertained only by patient observation of conduct under varying circumstances. Unfortunately, the opportunities for such observation have been too meager to warrant extended description, or anything more, indeed, than brief notice of salient points.

CLANS AND TOTEMS

The most noticeable social fact revealed about the Seri rancherías is the prominence of the females, especially the elderwomen, in the management of everyday affairs. The matrons erect the jacales without help from men or boys; they carry the meager belongings of the family and dispose them about the habitation in conformity with general custom and immediate convenience; and after the household is prepared, the men approach and range themselves about, apparently in a definite

¹ A convenient term proposed by Patton.

562 order, the matron's eldest brother coming first, the younger brothers
 592 next, and finally the husband, who squats in, or outside of, the open end
 of the bower. According to Nashim's detailed explanations, which
 [423] were corroborated by several elderwomen (notably the clanmother
 known to the Mexicans as Juana Maria) and verified by observation
 of the family movements, the house and its contents belong exclusively
 to the matron, though her brothers are entitled to places within it
 whenever they wish; while the husband has neither title nor fixed
 place, "because he belongs to another house"—though, as a matter of
 fact, he is frequently at or in the hut of his spouse, where he normally
 occupies the outermost place in the group and acts as a sort of outer
 guard or sentinel. Conformably to their proprietary position, the mat-
 rons have chief, if not sole, voice in extending and removing the
 rancheria; and such questions as that of the placement of a new jacal
 are discussed animatedly among them and finally decided by the dictum
 of the eldest in the group. The importance of the function thus exer-
 cised by the women has long been noted at Costa Rica and other points
 on the Seri frontier, for the rancherias are located and the initial jacal
 erected commonly by a solitary matron, sometimes by two or three
 aged dames; around this assemble other matrons and their children
 gather in the course of a day or two; while it is usually three or four
 days, and sometimes a week, before the brothers and husbands skulk
 singly or in small bands into the new rancheria.

Quite similar is the regimentation of the family groups as indicated
 by the correlative privileges and duties as to placement, as well as the
 reciprocal rights of command and the requirements of obedience. Ord-
 narily (especially when the men are not about) the elderwomen of the
 jacal exercise unlimited privileges as to placement of both persons and
 property, locating the sheet, the bedding, the fire (if any), and other pos-
 sessions at will, and assigning positions to the members of her family,
 the noble girls receiving especial attention; she is also the arbiter of
 disputes, the distributor of food, etc.; but in case of tumult, especially
 [614] when children from other jacales are present, she may invoke the author-
 ity of the clanmother, whose powers in the rancheria are analogous to
 those of the younger matrons in their own jacales. Even when the
 men are present they take little part in the regulation of personal con-
 duct, but tacitly accept the decision of matron or clanmother; yet in
 emergencies any of the women are ready to appeal for aid in the exe-
 cution of their will to a brother (preferably the elder brother) of the
 family, or, if need be great, to the brothers of the clanmother. So far
 as was observed, and so far as could be ascertained through informants,
 these appeals are always for executive and never for legislative or
 judicative cooperation; but various general facts indicate that in times
 of stress—in the heat of the chase, in the warpath-errand, etc.—the men
 thrust themselves into the initiative, while the women drop into an
 562 inferior legislative place. As an illustration of the ordination in some

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PROMINENT PLACE OF MATRONS.

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As an illustration of the ordination in some 129
what unusual circumstances, it may be noted that when the "Seri 582
belle" (Candelaria) refused to pose for a photograph she was supported 626
by the clanmother (Juana Maria) until the latter was placated by presents; and that when the belle refused to obey the mother's command—to the vociferous scandal of the entire group—Juana Maria appealed to Señor Encinas, as the conqueror of the tribe and hence as the virtual head of both rancho and rancheria. And when a younger Seri maiden (plate XXV) similarly refused to pose, and in like manner disobeyed her mother (again to the general disgust), the latter appealed to Mashim; when he, after first exacting additional presents for both girl and mother and a double amount for himself, put hands on the recalcitrant demoiselle and forced her into the pose required, despite the shrinking and tremulous terror perceptible even in the picture.

Commonly the regimentation of family, clan, and larger group appears 592
to be indicated approximately by the placement assumed spontaneously in the idle lounging of peace and plenty. A typical placement of a small group is illustrated in plate XIV. Here the family are assembled outside the jacal, but in the relative positions which would be assumed within. The matron (a Red Pelican woman) squats in easy reach of her few and squalid possessions; on her left, i. e., in the group back-ground and place of honor, sits the elderwoman of the rancheria (a Turtle); then comes the daughter of the family, followed by two girl-child guests of the group, the three occupying positions pertaining to chiefs or elder-brothers or, in their absence, to daughters; opposite the matron sits a younger brother, whose wife is a Turtle woman (daughter of the dame in the place of honor), and matron of another jacal. A few feet behind this brother (just outside the limits of the photograph reproduced, though shown on the duplicate negative) squats the husband, with his side to the group and face toward the direction of natural approach; while the place belonging to the sons of the family on the matron's right is temporarily occupied by a White Pelican girl, together with a dog, notable in the local pack for largely imported blood and correspondingly docile disposition. The place for the babe, were there one in the family, would be on the heap of odds and ends behind the matron. As in this group so in most others, the place of the sons is vacant; for the boys are at once the most restless and the most lawless members of the tribe—indeed, the striplings seem often to ignore the maternal injunctions and even to evade the rarely uttered avuncular orders, so that their movements are practically free, except in so far as they are themselves regimented or graded by strength and fleetness and success in hunting. [858] [862]

The raison d'être of the proprietorship and regimentation reflected in the everyday customs is satisfactorily indicated by that totemic feature of the social organization revealed in the face-painting described in 302 614

* This man was one of those involved in the Robinson butchery on Flores Island a few months before the picture was taken, and he was one of those executed or transported for the affair during the interval between the 1894 and 1895 expeditions.

614 hundred Seri at a time. They lived in maternal groups or clans in which the elder females were of great prominence in the management of everyday affairs. When, in the wanderings of a family a new camp was decided upon, the elder matron usually erected the jacal alone, without the aid of men or boys, gathering the long poles of the ocotillo or the branches of desert trees and fashioning them into an arched framework over which a covering of brush, and often later of turtle shells, served to give protection from the desert sun. After the household was prepared, she took her place within easy reach of the meager and squalid family possessions, and around this nucleus other matrons and their children gathered in the course of a day or two. It was usually three or four days, and sometimes a week, before the brothers and husbands came wandering in from their roving search for food to take their places at the new camp site.

482 From the turtle fishing camps on the chan-
312 nel, the nearest fresh water was at a distance

[p. 196(A)]

[90 cont.]

361 population. There is an obvious separation there between the
563 Seri and the yori, or non-Seri, with manifest differences in cultural patterns.

The yori occupy an extensive area per person; their homes are quite distant from one another, and four families in conjunction occupy a belt of land of about 100 by 50 meters.

361 The Seri are grouped by families, inhabiting minute
182 squares of from one and a half to two meters to a side. The yori
361 feeling of prestige, based on the territorial expanse of their property, contrasts with the feeling of security based on personal
511 contact that dominates many aspects of Seri life; the small size of the Seri habitation indicates, not a low standard of living, but a distinct [91] concept of comfort, according to which the Seri, having all the desert to live in, like the yori, confine themselves to the limits that personal contact permits.

592 In January, 1952, there were 35 dwellings, with an average of 4.6 persons in each, those lodging four, five, and six persons frankly predominating. Each three or four more closely related families occupied contiguous homes, forming relatively separate conjunctions by themselves, which we might call
596 macrofamilies.

The family is the basic Seri institution, which is manifest in all aspects of life: it is the center of production, co-operation, the division of labor, education, diversion, government, etc.

582 Going beyond the family and macrofamily organization,
619 we have a tribal structure based on the generalized exchange (2)
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2. Lévy Strauss, Les Structures Élémentaires de la Parenté [Elementary Kinship Structures], Paris, 1949.

of members for concluding marriage, by which all the Seri are actually linked by consanguinity or affinity. One is almost able to include all the members of the tribe on a single genealogical chart, systematically excluding only some few outsiders who have penetrated the group.

582 This situation, which would make one think of a primitive

123 handed to show their friendliness.

142 One was a young man with rather pleasant features, his braided
241 hair hanging below his shoulders. His name was Antonio Herrera. The
123 other was a wild-looking specimen called Ramon Blanco. His hair was a
(302) tangled mat with a short braid behind, suspicious black piercing eyes,
long sparse moustache and chin-beard hiding a broad cruel mouth. He
(411) wore the remnants of an old sweater, a short dirty kilt, or skirt,
nearly to his knees, a belt full of cartridges, mostly empty, and a
long knife in a rawhide scabbard.

123 The young man had been baptized and given a name by Roberto, who
(795) had acted as godfather or *patrono*, many years ago. He wore a hat,
(291) jacket, and pants of blue denim, and *guaraches*, or sandals of rawhide.

We shook hands all around and then they called and halloed in the
brush and soon three women and a lot of children, wild and half-
(415) clothed, filed into camp. The women were tall, gaunt, unkempt, ragged
(492) and barefooted, paying us not the slightest notice. They were bearing
(422) on their heads large baskets filled with all their earthly posses-
(854) sions---cooking ollas, scraps of cloth, pieces of turtle meat, bone
(221) brads, hair brushes, and odds and ends. They carried, also, an infant
or two wrapped in odd bits of rags. Several gaunt dogs followed in
their wake.

342 In all, three families came trailing in, removed their household
equipment from their heads and resumed their interrupted and primitive
(512) housekeeping. Each family occupied its apartment in the row of brush
shelters, separated from each other only by brush partitions with a
total lack of privacy. These shelters, always open to the sea, serve
as shade from the fierce rays of the sun, and also as windbreaks, but
(561) are no protection from infrequent rains. They are occupied only for a
brief period and then their nomadic tenants move on to fresh *cahuas*,
or sea turtle range.

123 Soon, a third man arrived while we were near the huts, Manuel
(42) Encina. He was a man of sixty-five, gray hair and mustache, seamed
features, and not evil looking. He was out of breath. He had gone for
water to the same water hole where we had been yesterday, struck our
tracks, had left his water cans and hurried back to warn his people.
He was greatly relieved to find friends.

Since he had gone for water, inquiry revealed there had been no
water in camp for two days, and six adults and one girl of thirteen
and six children were thirsty. We gladly gave them one of our five-
gallon cans of water and they were very grateful. They had caught a
(228) sea turtle the day before and gave us some turtle steaks which looked
(262) like beef or mutton.

312 As the camp was without water and we were running short, the young
492 man and Encina offered to get some. Each took a *palanca*, or short
123 shoulder pole with knotted ends, fitted empty five-gallon cans in

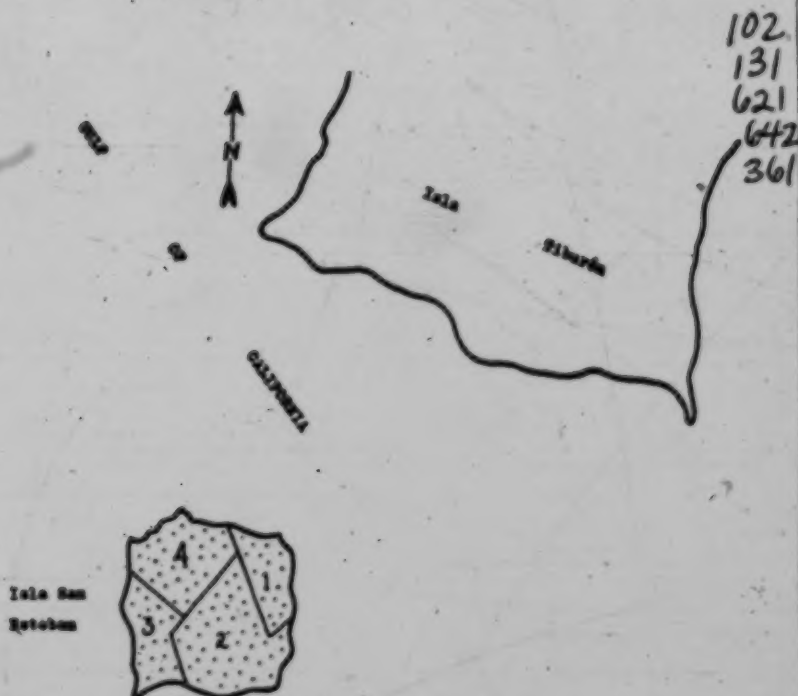


FIG. 5. Subdivisions of Band VI

BAND SOCIAL STRUCTURE

The social structure of the bands can be properly understood only in relation to the social structure of their smaller units, the *i'iritang*. The kin group which resided in and dominated each such subdivision constituted a clan.⁶ This group conforms to Murdock's three major specifications for clan designation.⁶

Murdock's first specification states that a kin group, to constitute a clan, must be based explicitly on a unilinear rule of descent. The kin group of each Seri band subdivision was based on patrilineal descent. An individual was closely associated with the group of kinsmen of his subdivision, all of whom were related to him through males only. The father was the head of his household. For example, he assumed leadership in marriage negotiations. Upon his death, the eldest son took his place.

The second specification states that such a kin group must have residential unity. Seri marriages were exogamous with respect to the subdivision,⁷ and the rule of residence was patrilocal. The domicile was set up near the home of the groom's parents.